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MARGO LEFT HER HUSBAND

ERIC VINCENT OROSCO

The men came to her door at seven a.m. and left at seven forty-five. Margo did not let them in; she stood behind the thin screen of her security door and spoke to them with her lips pressed against the interlacing metal. They were here for her roof and it was this fact that kept her from inviting them inside. The men stood in a pattern that would look like a diamond from above. Their hands were clasped in front of them and they took turns speaking in a clockwise order.

“We have come for your roof,”

“It is a fine roof,”

“We want it,”

“The roof,” They said.

Margo knew these things before they spoke. She heard of these men in whispers spoken at the

farmers market; the one under the Silver Eagle overpass where Margo would haggle dollars and cents for beans, rice, and small heads of lettuce. Women would clutch their baskets of produce and twirl their unadorned ring fingers around the greens of carrots while speaking of these men. Margo ignored the women at first and instead focused on the money crumpled loosely in her jean pockets, but over time the voices of the women grew until a distant murmur became a steady chant.

She moved away from the door, the taste of metal still against her lips. Dust lingered in the streams of light that filtered through her drawn blinds. She made a note to open a window once the men had left. Margo grabbed the canister of beans from her pantry and made her way back to the front door.

The men did not move as she tossed a handful of beans at their feet. The brown pintos nestled between yellowing blades of grass and the small pebbles of a makeshift driveway. She grabbed another handful of beans.

“We have come for your roof,”

“These beans are not fine,”

“We don’t want it,”

“The beans,” They said to her offering.

Margo closed her front door and set the canister at her feet. She stretched her arms high into the air and her fingers reached for the ceiling. Outside the men did not move; they stood with hands still clasped in front and eyes aimed at the point where roof meets sky.

At seven forty-four the men unclasped their hands and began to pluck the beans out of the grass and place them into the pockets of their trousers. When the beans were gathered they left.

Anna arrived at one p.m. with a cloth bag of yarn and wooden needles. Her small feet kicked up pebbles and a few stray beans. She scrunched her nose at the discarded food and called for her friend. Mar-

go emerged from the front door smiling. Her hair was clipped into a makeshift bun and she beckoned Anna in with a wave of her left hand.

“We could sell scarves, Margo,” Anna suggested while setting her bag down near the door and the canister of beans. “The older women, they do it often under Silver Eagle.”

Margo had settled into a criss-crossed position on the brown carpet, her hands flipping through picture magazines, tearing out strips of purple and laying them in front of her. She shook her head and a strand of hair came loose.

“I’m not one of those women.”

Anna leaned against the closed door and exhaled. Her hands drummed against the white of the wood and after a passing minute she sank down into a sitting position, her small feet caught in a strand of dust and light. “What will you eat if you use all the beans?”

“I’m going to paint my bedroom,” Margo said, lifting up torn swatches of color, turning her body to face bare walls and pressing the colors against them. “And what will that do? Save the money. They want more.”

Margo licked the back of one of the swatches and pressed it to the wall. It did not stick.

"They will find other women to bother, my roof is not the only roof."

"But it is your roof they want, Margo. There are others, yes, but first they want yours."

Margo looked at her friend who had begun to pull the yarn and needles out from her bag and watched her delicate fingers work like little spiders. She watched the ring on Anna's finger rise and fall with the momentum of the wooden needles. Margo looked at her own hands that clutched swatches of lavenders and plums and she could still see the line of discoloration where a ring once rested.

"Stay with me tonight," Margo said, laying her head down in the torn picture magazine. The wooden needles clicked with a steady rhythm.

"My husband will be hungry when he comes home. Margo, you know I cannot stay."

From the floor Margo reached up to the ceiling and stretched her ten digits till the skin felt taut and her muscles ached. There were patterns

above, little constellations of stucco that rose across a white ceiling, scarring its surface. It reminded her of the goosepimples she would get across her arm whenever a distant noise would stir her sleep.

"This day will be long," Margo said while rising, little flurries of lint and dust parting from her body. "I will simmer the rice in chicken stock and rosemary. There is bread in my pantry and I will warm it and adorn it with butter. I will eat this meal under my roof and I will look at my bare walls for one last night before I dip my hands into pigments of violets and run their slick texture over the still body of my home. I will feel its pulse, faint and staggered, and I will press my body into it and breathe life into a fresh coat. A house without a man is not a withering crop to be harvested, it is not a weed to plucked, it is not a tumor of the skin. A house without a man is but a seed to be planted by the thin fingers of a woman. My nails will be blackened with dirt, my skin cut by small rocks, my color faded by dust. But I will continue to sow in this sickened earth and dream at night

for a cluster of sprouts. This is what I will do, Anna, and I will never sell beneath Silver Eagle. I am not one of those women. My life does not end in the absence of man."

That night Margo wrapped her body in cotton sheets and crawled onto her large bed before the hour struck ten p.m. She pulled herself into the cluster of pillows she kept pressed against the left side of the mattress. With the soft weight of fabric on top of her, she closed her eyes and drifted to the echoes of the women under Silver Eagle.

It is to be expected, the voices sang, that a woman without a man is but a girl. And how can girl take care of herself?

But why take from these girls? Another voice added. There were but whispers in reply.

Because they can.

As the hour passed into midnight, Margo heard the sound of hammers and saws and her sleeping body shuddered.